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ABSTRACT

This speech is an attempt to analyze and understand the generation of radical students. Though the author feels that all young people rebel, in all generations, he nonetheless contends that the discontent of the 60's was qualitatively different. He traces its historical sources through the increasing number of graduate students and their increasing awareness of the difficulties of "getting into" the academic system; a reaction against the highly standardized and impersonal nature of higher education in the 50's; and the greater sophistication, experience and knowledgeability of the students. He feels that the educational establishment can respond to this unrest in positive ways. He suggests that education return to its traditional role, rather than emphasize professional training, it should work on the development of each individual's potentialities. There must be increasing emphasis on the arts and humanities; women will continue to redefine their roles and goals; and students should be encouraged to participate in and influence educational institutions and their own educations. The authorities should not, however, discontinue their role as adult, authority figures. Student freedom should continue to be limited. (NG)

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New Orleans -- March 1966

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

"THE COLLEGE STUDENT OF THE SIXTIES"

Address Presented By

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*THE STUDENTS WE TEACH TODAY

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If one works in academic institutions over a long period of time, he is not impressed so much by the differences among generations of students as by the similarities. Recently I had an opportunity to see filmed interviews with some of the students who had taken part in the "revolt" at Berkeley in the fall of 1964. What came through most sharply, from behind the beards and the careless dress, was the youthfulness of these people. It struck me that they had a good deal in common with the young people of my own day or those whom I knew at Vassar during the 1950's. While there is no doubt something new in student's concern to reform the educational system or at least to have some voice in determining their own education, most of the events that took place at Berkeley were quite characteristic of the doings of young people of any period. And I hasten to add, the adults involved also behaved true to form.

What all generations of college students have in common is their age and developmental status. They typically are having problems of identity and self-esteem. They are idealistic, but easily disillusioned

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*Paper relating to the keynote address concerning the college student of the sixties presented by Dr. Sanford at the 43rd Annual Conference of The Association of College Unions -- International held in New Orleans, March, 1966.

when it turns out that the adult figures they have admired have feet of clay. They are torn between loyalty to old values and advancement toward new ones. They demand independence, are sometimes even rebellious, yet they need the reassurance that adult authority stands firm.

Sociologically, undergraduates are not yet committed to particular identities or social roles. They are free of the responsibilities and commitments that people assume as they enter adulthood. This is why a college student can participate in marches in Mississippi one year and be on the way to becoming a corporation lawyer the next. In other words, a student can have one identity today, another tomorrow. (Not so the graduate student, however, who has already settled upon a course of study and who is probably married. His commitments would make it out of the question for him to try on different identities as the undergraduate can.)

This explains, I think, why cultures such as ours depend upon the youth to initiate social change. They are counted upon to do the kinds of things that adults, because of their commitments, are in no position to begin. This also explains in considerable part, I think, our mixed feelings toward the youth. On the one side we tend to live vicariously in them, to identify ourselves with some of their slightly radical or offbeat doings, but at the same time they make us a little nervous because we are not absolutely sure that they are going to settle down in a few years and be just like everybody else (though, of course, they always do). I can recall a few years ago the disappointment with which a group of businessmen greeted the news that college students on the whole were very conservative. They had thought that all college

students were like the activist minority and assumed that this is how it was supposed to be--radical--young man, conservative--old man.

But in saying that there are more similarities than differences between successive generations of students, one cannot overlook the differences which do exist. In this paper, we will consider in what ways today's student is different from those who have gone before him, what forces have made him different, and what all this means for the institution which undertakes to educate him.

THE STUDENT AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Processes in society become somehow built into the individual, so that the people who are brought up in one period will naturally differ from people brought up in another period. This is particularly evident in the area of cultural attitudes toward child-rearing. Today's students have been brought up in a period in which permissiveness in child-training was the rule. This is one reason, I think, why young people now are at such loose ends in coping with authority. Students who have known nothing but permissive upbringing, and who are being encouraged by their teachers to think for themselves and make their own decisions, respond to the slightest restriction as if their lives were being totally dominated. They do not really understand authority because they have had so little experience with it.

The most determinative social forces on the student are, of course, the events and climate of opinion that prevail while he is in college. In the research at Vassar College sponsored by the Mellon Foundation, we were able to study different generations of alumnae,

going all the way back to the class of 1904. When that class came for its fiftieth reunion at Vassar, we discovered such interesting things about these ladies that we later went on to study the classes of 1912, '20, '30, '40, and '50--as well as the students then attending Vassar. It was clear from this study that the women who were graduated at earlier times still showed in their own attitudes and values much of the social climate that prevailed at the time they were in college.

These findings say something rather significant about the importance of college. They suggest that William James may have been right when he said that the ideas that men have before they are twenty-five are the only ideas they will ever have, apart from their work. It suggests that college is indeed a critical time for implanting the attitudes and values that are likely to stay with people all their lives. The faculty who are now dominant in the universities were themselves in college or graduate school during the 1930's. As a result of the economic realities of that period, they faced the world with security very much on their minds. In their own careers they moved toward finding a profession that would give lasting security, so it is hardly surprising that now, when these men have come to power, the accent on specialization and professionalization in education has increased rapidly. As students, many of these men were denied the opportunity to enjoy the old conception of liberal education. As faculty members, they have taken it for granted, assuming that the liberal values of the university would take care of themselves. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

Of all the generations of students to pass through American colleges and universities, we know the most about those who were in

college during the 1950's. Various researchers found the students of that period to be passive, conformist, politically disinterested, focused on their own private sphere, concerned about their own chances in life, fond of comfort, eager for a secure place in society, etc. The young women seemed to be engaging in a flight into femininity; Vassar girls on the average wanted to have four children -- and quickly, too. They conceived of the role in society as that of the homemaker or wife of the warrior-husband, who would meet him at the door when he came home from work with a bowl of hot wine. These attitudes surely had something to do with the state of our society in the fifties. The striking thing about that period in social and economic terms was the relative shortage of young people of college age, a result of the lower birthrate that prevailed during the depression years. This shortage existed at the same time as an enormous economic boom, accompanied by concern about armaments. This combination of circumstances is a natural for producing conservative ideology, and so it did. We find in educational thinking of the fifties a heavy accent on science, special programs for the gifted, high standards and toughness in education, and a general speeding up of everything. Education was geared to produce young people who would strengthen our economy or our society.

Colleges took advantage of this situation to upgrade themselves. The government began pouring money into higher education, particularly at the graduate level, in order to speed up production of the people who were needed to man the machinery of society. Specialists in the colleges took advantage of this situation to further their own specialties. In the late forties, we in the psychology department at the University of

California saw our chance to make a great thing of psychology. We received grants from the Veterans Administration and from the U.S. Public Health Administration for hurry-up programs in training graduate students, so we went in for specialization in a big way, neglecting undergraduate education rather grossly but advancing psychology. We thought this specialization was the most natural thing in the world. We did not realize that all the other departments were doing the same thing--resulting in a frightful loss to undergraduate liberal education.

Students, of course, were not objecting. They could see that by doing what their teachers said, by taking full advantage of these opportunities for training, they could get into society faster and find a place that would be suitably rewarding. This, I think, was why the White House Conference on Education of the middle fifties seemed to have such a hollow sound. Educators spoke of the great aims of liberal education, but their actions revealed a primary interest in preparing young people professionally and vocationally to keep the system going.

SOCIETAL INFLUENCES ON TODAY'S STUDENTS

What is the situation today, just a decade later? Certainly it is different. No one is complaining now about the shortage of young people; on the contrary, we have what sometimes seems like an endless supply. We are less worried about maintaining production at a high level--thanks to our technology, automation, and the general organized way in which we have learned to do things. Consequently, there is less emphasis now on the need for young people to jump into jobs, just to keep the machinery of society going. If we talk about the differences

between students of the middle fifties and those now in college, we are probably justified in attributing those differences to differences in the situations in which they have lived.

In spite of the radical change between the middle fifties and today, colleges and universities, by and large, have just begun to adapt themselves to it--if they have recognized it at all. We are experiencing a kind of lag between what we are doing in education and what the times require.

Students, for their part, are no longer sold on the idea of hurrying to get their degrees so they can take a specified place in the productive machinery of the nation. Instead, they are asking what the nation is for, or what great purposes does it have to which they might dedicate themselves. They do not see the vocational problem as simply a matter of getting good grades, getting into a good graduate school, and getting a good job. They are looking for something bigger and more generally purposeful, something that has to do not only with this nation but with the world. The idealism that is so marked in today's students was perhaps always there, but it has been supported recently by events on the national scene--by the civil rights movement, the Peace Corps, the poverty program, etc. If you take students with this outlook and treat them exactly the same way students were treated in the fifties, giving them a deluge of meaningless work and equating higher standards with more work, you are bound to create some kind of disaffection.

Much of the rebelliousness that has been observed on some campuses has to do with the fact that the concept of in loco parentis has been changing its meaning. Because of the increasing size of the

universities and the increasing independence and general savvy of the students, the caring aspect of in loco parentis has been changing its meaning. But the colleges nevertheless have retained the disciplinary aspect, so that students have been asked to live in a situation--to live in a family, we might say--in which nobody really cares about their development but everybody cares a lot about whether they behave themselves. This seems to me to be an excellent way to produce a rebellious child. Nevertheless, this attitude is evidenced in the colleges almost as if by deliberation.

Another aspect of the current situation favorable to activism, rebellion, or reform movements on the campus is the changed situation of the graduate student. The greatly increased number of students in a given graduate school has, in many places and in many departments, changed the nature of graduate education. In the "good old days," being admitted to graduate school meant that one was already admitted to the community of scholars. One now joined the management, so to speak. One began participating already as a member of an academic community. Nowadays, graduate students are prevented from doing this by being given a long series of hurdles, each of which can be used as a means for throwing them out of the academic community altogether. A graduate student can stay a given place for perhaps three years; he might, if he works at it, have two or three interviews with one or another professor; but he still will not know whether he is a member of the academic community or not.

The result of this situation has been that graduate students have begun to ask whether or not the channels into this desirable

community might not be so firmly blocked as to make a passage too difficult. They even begin to ask whether the rewards of being in that system are great enough to justify the effort. In these circumstances they have been changing sides and acting as if they were undergraduates. They have been making common cause with the peers, the proletariat, the workers--that is to say, the undergraduate students. This fact looms as very important in the events at Berkeley. Graduate students, some of whom had been at the university for four years or more and knew all about it, were in a position to take leadership. This fact made all the difference. While the undergraduate can usually manage to "sit out" a bad situation until summer or graduation graduate students intend to remain for quite a while and have a special interest in reform. This interest is not just personal frustration, dissatisfaction, or rebellion. Graduate students have a feeling that something ought to be changed so that the current crop of students will not be as miserable as they were. They look back on their own undergraduate years and think how much was lost, how much their education might have given them which it did not.

I take this phenomenon very seriously. The present crop of graduate students, particularly in the social science and the humanities, have quite a different outlook from that which prevailed five or ten years ago. It is possible that they will begin to restore some of the values of the liberal university which we have lost.

Another difference in today's students which is quite evident to the college teacher who has taught for a number of years is their knowledgeability and sophistication. Often this seems to me to be a kind of precociousness. It results, I think, from the trend toward

upgrading, forcing students to read more and more, starting everything earlier and earlier. In my view there is no great point in having young people read Freud and Camus in high school, as they do now at some of the advanced schools. They thus lose the chance to discover these ideas later, in college, when they would be meaningful. Nevertheless, the stepped-up requirements do give the student a knowledgeability, and one has to assume this fact if he talks to students. He must revise his conception of how much students know and how sophisticated they are. He also must make a distinction between those who read and take the responsibility for learning upon themselves and those who are equally competent but do not do so.

Their greater knowledge makes today's students critical. They do not take things just on faith, as one might expect them to; they are interested in knowing your sources of information and even how the data were collected. When a representative of the State Department spoke at Stanford in connection with one of the Viet Nam "teach-ins", he cited a precise figure for the number of North Vietnamese who were to be found fighting in South Viet Nam, but 5,000 students laughed at him. They could only laugh at the supposition that anybody could know the precise number in such circumstances.

Students in the selective institutions have also been around a lot compared with students even ten years ago. The number of students who have studied or traveled abroad, who have been in the Peace Corps, or have had extraordinary experience in social action during the summer is surprisingly large. One who deals with them must take this fact into account. The teacher who undertakes to lecture students on Africa, for

example, had better reckon with the likelihood that some of the students in the class have been there and are in a position to tell him what goes on.

One happy aspect of student travel and world awareness is a changed attitude toward professors. As students become more knowledgeable they seem better able to appreciate knowledgeability in their professors. The professors, for their part, have improved their status enormously by showing that they can get grants, consultantships, and other recognition of their merit. Perhaps professors are not loved as much as they used to be, but they are certainly respected more. Movies used to portray the professor as a fuddy-duddy, slightly laughable but lovable old codger, but we seldom see this any more. The modern professor is something of a go-getter, who carries out his university's expectations that he will raise money and produce knowledge, whether or not he contributes anything to teaching.

Another interesting phenomenon is the decline in the disposition of students to make friends in college. During the fifties I began to encounter boys in the dormitory who were simply not developing any friendships, or boys who had spent four years at the same college yet never kept in touch with any of their classmates after graduation. In many cases this failure seemed to be tied up with competitiveness, with the felt necessity on the part of the young man to act as if he were something that he was not, with feat of the kind of self-revelation that is necessary in a deep-growing friendship, even with a disposition to utilize his acquaintances in the interests of some goal that he had set for himself. The decline in college friendships has assumed serious

proportions and may have something to do with the need that students voice nowadays for community and for overcoming the impersonality of the large university.

We cannot ignore either the accent on thrills and pleasure-seeking to be found in the present generation--an accent which I believe is different from earlier years. The idea of sex as recreation, as put forward by Playboy magazine, has its appeal for the boys, although the girls, as always, are interested in relationships. The interest in the kind of experience to be had from drugs, while still not extraordinary, is certainly higher than it was ten years ago. Perhaps these tendencies among students reflect in part the general excitement and disillusionment in which many people in our society find themselves. Perhaps it is nothing more than an imitation of the adult fun culture that we see everywhere around us. In any event, it is doubtful that this can be understood as genuine freedom. More likely it is a way of dealing with the anxiety which normally accompanies impulse expression, a defensive isolation of the guilt-provoking action from the rest of the personality. This kind of thing can be seen in American movies in which drinking is made to appear as casual as lighting a cigarette and is not supposed to have any effects one way or the other.

Pleasure-seeking may appear to be the order of the day, but one who knows students very well would not conclude that it represents the culture of the future. There is much soul-searching going on, on our campuses today. Young people feel they cannot go back to the ethic of their parents--in many cases a 19th century ethic--but they cannot rest easily with a Playboy morality either. The movement tends to be

toward finding a new basis for morality in what is favorable to personal development.*

SOCIAL CHANGE AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

In the new situation into which we are moving, then, I believe we are in for educational innovation and reform. The changes will not be just in response to student unrest but, rather, in response to the same conditions that students have been responding to. At the same time, I do not doubt that student concern may speed change. The new experimental college at the University of California at Berkeley (set up by Professor Joseph Tusman on the old Micheljohn Wisconsin model) had been planned for some time, but the Free Speech Movement, and the fears and guilt feelings which it aroused in faculty members, were no doubt what finally made it possible to realize the plan.

While societal pressures probably will not allow the accent on professional training to decline very much, I do not think it will continue to have the insistent quality that it had during the fifties. There will be less accent on educating students to man the system and more on educating them to participate in its benefits. Economically, we can anticipate a period of increasing affluence and leisure, and a rapid decline in the number of jobs which can be fulfilled without an education. In order to keep the wheels turning, we must have more and more people spending their time in the educational enterprise, either teaching

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*This search for a new ethic was discussed at length in a lecture which I delivered in the Jake Gimbel Series at Stanford, 1964. Portions of the paper later appeared in the NEA Journal, Vol. 54, No. 4, April 1965, pages 20 - 23.

or learning. There is a boundless amount to be taught and learned, and these pursuits are not susceptible to unemployment. They can be carried on endlessly quite independently of what the machines are doing.

In these circumstances, it seems likely that there will be a return to the traditional goal of education in this country--the goal of developing each individual's potentialities as fully as possible, rather than merely providing him with job skills. Education will again pay attention to a wide range of abilities, not just to the ability to master abstract material. It will pay attention to many aspects of the person--all of those aspects that need to be and can be developed. This kind of education will, I think, be offered to a higher and higher proportion of young people who are graduating from high school. There may be, in fact, I believe there will have to be, some totally new institutions developed to educate this group. Many circles in this country, including government circles, are beginning to realize that lack of ability or reduced ability is no reason why a person should not be developed as fully as possible. As a matter of fact, psychology, which for a long time has led us to overestimate the unteachability of some people, now is showing that it is possible to teach many of those whom we used to think were totally limited by their genes.

Among women I expect to see a continuing search for new designs for living. They will begin to break out of the career-versus-marriage bind. Perhaps we shall go back to the state of affairs of 1937 when a much higher proportion of college women went to graduate school than is the case today. There will still be a great market for sex and glamor and homemaking, but educated women will be much more

often combining homemaking with some kind of activity outside the home. I hope this activity will in many cases be political, activity designed to change the conditions of life for women as well as for everybody else. I think we shall also see more women working in paid, part time, semi-professional jobs that have to do with culture, health, education, and welfare.

Colleges, of course, are slow to change in response to the kinds of social changes that I've been describing; but they do change some. They certainly changed in response to social conditions of the postwar era, and they may change in response to the new conditions that I have mentioned. They may respond, for example, to the widely felt need in our society for something to counter the effects of our technology--a technology which goes its own way, which nobody controls, and which tends to dominate our lives. There is a widespread belief that the only way to counter the effects of this technology is by a deliberate effort to do things in an untechnological, personal way in our colleges. There must be an increasing accent on the arts and the humanities--all those kinds of activities that cannot be duplicated by machines. And, of course, we must increase our efforts to make the college or university a truly human community.

In looking at the young people of today, we should never forget that they are young people, characterized by many of the same features which have always characterized young people; but, like everybody else, they do respond to the times, and the present times are in some respects different. Our times offer certain perils, but they also offer certain great opportunities.

Recently I have sensed a growing willingness among educators to take advantage of these opportunities. In fact, the year 1965 was called by some "The Year of the Student." A colleague who attended the Danforth Conference on Higher Education of that year reported hopefully that the participants seemed to be interested in students in a new and significant way. This is quite a change when one recalls the mood of similar conferences only three or four years earlier, conferences which quickly degenerated into a debate between people who were interested in students and people who thought that any interest in students would surely "water down" the excellence of education--that those of us who were interested in students really wanted to substitute counseling for teaching or even to turn the college into a kind of psychiatric community. Today I doubt whether one would hear this. As a matter of fact, people of whom I would not have believed it possible have been displaying an interest in students--in how they learn, their values, their attitudes, their development as people.

For a long time now I have been arguing that we should give students every opportunity to express their views about their own education and about the government of the college, and that we should listen to them when they do. Now, however, in the light of this sudden upsurge of sympathy with the student, I feel perhaps I should also remind my colleagues that the student needs at the same time to be reassured that the institution is still in the hands of understanding but authoritative adults. This does not mean that we must return to some kind of authoritarian regime. On the contrary, as President James P. Dixon and other officials of Antioch College learned long ago, if you give students all

the rope they can use, you soon discover how conservative they really are and how incapable of governing themselves or of making any of the great decisions that have to be made affecting them. Allowing students more freedom than they can handle may seem a little cruel, I suppose, but it gives the adults--the faculty and administration--an opportunity to step in and make the decisions which are, in the end, their responsibility anyway.

There is really no way for us, as educators, to avoid assuming leadership; students must have it. We will hope, of course, that the adults who wield authority will be people who have listened to students, who know how students develop, and who will do not what the students say they want but what students' actions say they need. Certainly, we will hope that these adults will always use their leadership and make their decisions in the interests of the individual student's becoming what he can become.